

**“Decision Time”**  
**Matthew 7:13-29**  
**September 20, 2015**

---

**INTRODUCTION:**

We come today to the conclusion of Jesus’ sermon, and he concludes like most preachers, with a call to make a decision. Jesus isn’t preaching to entertain or to impress with his knowledge and eloquence. He doesn’t want people to applaud; he wants them to repent and to follow him into the kingdom of God he came to inaugurate. Several years ago, I heard a story about one of our church members who had gone to a restaurant one Sunday after church. While there, he saw another church member who was just coming into town and who had missed church that morning. The church member who had been in church said, “O, it’s too bad you missed church today. Brad preached a really good sermon.” The other member replied, “O, that’s good. What was the sermon about?” After an awkward silence, the first member confessed that he couldn’t remember, though it had been less than an hour since he had heard the sermon. Whether that situation was due to the failure of the preacher or this listener, that sermon was clearly a failure. Good sermons make a difference in people’s lives by calling them to decide.

Jesus calls us to decide by issuing four warnings. As we read these warnings, we need to remember to hear these warnings as Jesus intends them, filled with love for us. Warnings are different from threats in that warnings are loving while threats are aggressively violent. Jesus may speak with sternness, but it’s the sternness of the loving parent who is concerned to protect his children from danger. All four of these warnings feature two choices, and they are choices each one of us is confronted with today. Let’s consider them now.

**I. Two Paths**

This first warning describes two gates, two paths and two destinations. Let’s begin with the destination. There is a great deal at stake in the gate and path chosen precisely because of the different destinations resulting from whatever choice is made. The broad path leads to destruction and the narrow to life. Think with me about this destruction. It doesn’t mean annihilation of one’s existence, but rather the destruction of everything that is good. Because God is the author of all good, those who choose their own path instead of God’s path find that hell is the place where such beautiful things as love, truth, joy, peace and hope are destroyed and will never be found again.

If we are to get on the right path, the one that leads to life, we must enter through the right gate. There are two possibilities listed, one narrow and one

broad. It is the narrow gate that leads to the path Jesus wants us to take, but why must it be narrow? It must be narrow because we must leave behind everything in order to enter this path. To put it in the terms of one of Jesus' parables, to have Jesus as our treasure will require us to sell all that we have in order to buy the field where that treasure is buried. You can't follow Jesus unless you are willing to forsake all. You must leave behind self-righteousness, self-fulfillment, selfish ambition and all known sin. In the words of the hymn writer, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

Once we enter through the narrow gate, we find ourselves on a narrow path. The other path is broad, which speaks of the fact that it has no curbs, no limits. It is the path our world wants when it says that all paths lead to heaven. In our sin, we want to choose our own path and have God somehow endorse that path. Those on the broad path want to do whatever they want to do and have God say that it is okay. That's why they are so angry at any who say that the path is narrow. Those of us who say that Jesus is the only way to heaven are accused of being narrow-minded, and in a way they are right. We are narrow-minded like the skydiver instructor who insists that his students not jump out of the airplane without a parachute.

Let's think a little more about this path that leads to life. It is a hard path, and the word for "hard" in verse 14 is a form of a word which always refers to suffering and persecution. So this hard road is not without its difficulties. But the difficulties seem light because it is the road Jesus walks with us. Jesus will refer to that a little later in Matthew's Gospel when he invites us to come to him and take up his yoke. Do you know what a yoke is? It is that large wooden collar that joins together two animals like oxen or horses as they pull together. Jesus says his burden is light. The path on which we walk may include suffering, but because we are yoked to Jesus, he does the pulling and we get to enjoy nearness to him.

Let me mention one more important truth about this path. It is a path that is marked out for us, not one we make for ourselves. We're not being called to bushwhack in the forest, but to follow a path that has already been laid out for us. God knows the path that will lead us to life, and our need is simply to trust him and keep moving. I shared this poem in a sermon eight years ago, and I want to do so again, because it speaks so well about this path that leads to life.

At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him.

But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know just when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has

not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable... It was the shortest distance between two points.

But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places at breakneck speeds, it was all I could do to hang on! Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!"

I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust.

I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me gifts to take on my journey, My Lord's and mine.

And we were off again. He said, "Give the gifts away; they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it; but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ.

And when I'm sure I just can't do anymore, He just smiles and says... "Pedal."

The key is to find the narrow gate that leads to this path. It is a small gate that is easily missed, and Jesus says there are many who do miss it. How can you find it? In order to find the gate that leads to life, all you need to know is that Jesus is the door. Find Jesus and follow him and he will lead you to life.

## **II. Two Teachers**

Jesus' next warning has to do with teachers that will not lead you to Jesus but away from him. They are false teachers, referred to here as false prophets. We are to beware of them because they will do much damage to God's people, like a wolf turned loose on a flock of sheep. But we must be able to spot them, and the problem is that false prophets don't hang a sign on their neck that says, "I'm a false teacher—Beware!" On the contrary, they disguise themselves to look genuine. They are like wolves wearing the hide of sheep. On the outside, they appear to be genuine. But on the inside they are ravenous wolves who will bring destruction. One of the applications of this is not to let yourself be fooled by appearances. Just because someone has educational credentials, an attractive appearance, eloquence, a good sense of humor or an ability to appear godly in his or her public demeanor doesn't mean that they are true prophets.

How then can a false teacher be spotted? Jesus answers that question by changing the metaphor to the fruit borne by a tree. A wolf may be able to disguise himself, but a tree can never bear fruit different from the true nature

of the tree. This requires a little patience, but it is a completely reliable test. What is the fruit we ought to expect to see in a true prophet? There are at least three categories of fruit. There is first of all the fruit of Christ-like character, summarized as the fruit of the Spirit, especially the fruit of love. There is secondly the fruit of what actually comes out of his mouth, and the test of how faithful to the Scriptures it is. Then there is the fruit of those to whom he has ministered. If the fruit of the Spirit is largely absent in the lives of those who have sat under his teaching, then he is a false teacher.

### III. Two Speeches

These are some of the most frightening verses in the Bible, warning us of the danger of false assurance. It is possible to be completely confident and completely wrong at the same time. These people are both completely confident of their salvation and completely wrong about their final destiny. Their confidence seems at first to be well-founded. They call Jesus “Lord.” Their theology is sound and orthodox, because Jesus is indeed the Lord. They are fervent about it, indicated by the repetition, “Lord, Lord.” What’s more, these people have been God’s instruments of powerful signs, including prophecy, exorcism of demons and “many mighty works,” all done in the name of Jesus. It would seem that these individuals would be on everyone’s list of the most likely people to get into heaven. But in spite of their orthodox theology and powerful signs, Jesus will send them to hell on judgment day.

What is the problem that leads to their condemnation? It is the incompatibility between their words and their hearts. Notice the last word of Jesus’ sentencing of them. He calls them “**workers of lawlessness**” (v. 23). They had a fundamental difference with Jesus over what is important. They believed that if they had the right theology and spoke the right words, then everything would turn out okay. Jesus believes that orthodoxy and the right words can be faked. A truer test is what one does when no one is looking. I notice that all three of the mighty signs they point to are things done publicly. It is not the eloquence and orthodoxy of our words spoken in public that indicates God’s work within us, but our words and actions done privately and in secret. So Jesus answers their speech with a speech of his own, one that none of us will ever want to hear. “**I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.**” How is it that we can be sure we will never hear such words? The answer to that question brings us to our final warning.

### IV. Two Builders

Two builders each erect a house. It takes a large amount of time and money to build a house. These houses are indistinguishable from one another after their completion. Both apparently are significant houses able to shelter the

family living within. But one builder took a shortcut that is not easily detected when the house is complete. He neglected to dig a foundation down to the rock. Foundation work is hard, dirty work. And foundations are covered up once they are dug. Perhaps this foolish builder reasoned that it was a colossal waste of time and money to put so much work into something no one would ever see. Better to save the money for the more showy parts of the house. He had in mind a gourmet kitchen that would be the envy of all his neighbors. His strategy worked until the storms came. His shortcut proved tragically short-sighted as the entire house came crashing down.

Jesus isn't talking about building houses here, but building lives. It is possible to build a life without giving sufficient attention to the foundation. Everything is focused on what looks good and what is seen. That strategy can work for a time, but will eventually be exposed as foolish when the storms of life come. What are these storms? They could be some form of suffering, perhaps some illness or a serious financial setback. The ultimate storm is Judgment Day, when any problem with a foundation will be exposed and one's house will come crashing down in a heap of ruin if the foundation is lacking.

What is the proper foundation for a life? Jesus words it like this. **“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock”** (v. 24). Only the life built on hearing and doing Jesus' words will survive the storms of life, particularly the judgment of a holy God. Hearing in itself is good, but by itself is tragic. Our hearing of Jesus must be matched with doing. Doing is the indication that you have really heard. Parents warn their young teenage drivers about the dangers of texting while driving. There is only one evidence that the teenager believes the parent, and that is that they don't text and drive. If they text while driving, it reveals that they don't really believe the parent.

So when Jesus speaks about the reality of hell and the reality of his dying to save us from hell, an indication that we believe him is that we seek refuge in him alone. When Jesus warns us about false teachers, about going along with the crowd as they walk the broad road leading to destruction and about the dangers of words and heart that are not in sync, we believe him and make sure we avoid these dangers.

## **CONCLUSION:**

In short, it all boils down to trusting and following Jesus. He is the narrow gate through which we walk to get on the path leading to life. He is the true teacher, the Judge, the foundation. Nothing is more important than leaving all else and following Jesus. Without doing so, your life is a great house that will crumble when the storms come. With Jesus, all will be safe. Jesus tells us this because he loves us.